

Appl. No. 09/618,741

Amendments to the Specification:

Please replace the paragraph on page 7 beginning at line 22 with the following amended paragraph:

In another method of forming AlON, the AlON powder is formed by a continuous rotary process. Referring to Fig. 6, a continuous rotary system 300 includes a furnace 110, a graphite retort 120 inside furnace 110, a drive motor 130, and a collection hopper 160 for collecting the product mixture 170 (formed AlON). System 300 further includes a feeder 310, a feed hopper 320, a load-lock hopper 330, and a gate valve 340 between feed hopper 320 and load-lock hopper 330. Retort 120 is similar in construction to the retorts described above, e.g., angling downwardly from feeder 310 and rotatable inside furnace 110 via drive motor 130. Furthermore, retort 120 of system 300 is constructed with sufficient length such that as reaction mixture 150 travels from input end 350 of retort 120 to output end 360 of retort 120, the residence time of mixture 150 in heated retort 120 is sufficient for mixture 150 to form AlON. In other words, retort 120 is made ~~sufficient~~ sufficiently long such that reaction mixture 150 that is introduced into retort 120 from feeder 310 is converted into AlON 170 by the time the reaction mixture reaches opening 180.

Please replace the paragraph on page 8 beginning at line 4 with the following amended paragraph:

In operation, furnace 110 is heated to the soak temperature and retort 120 is rotating to disperse the alumina/carbon particles that are introduced into retort 120. Nitrogen gas flows in inlet 112 and out outlet 114. With gate valve 340 closed, reactant mixture 150 is loaded into load-lock hopper 330, which is evacuated of air and purged with nitrogen. Purging system 300 with nitrogen helps to prolong the life of the graphite retort. Reactant mixture 150 is then introduced into feed hopper 320 by opening gate

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valve 340. Feed hopper 320 introduces mixture 150 into feeder 310, which introduces mixture 150 into retort 120 at a predetermined rate, e.g., volumetrically or gravimetrically. Feeder 310 can be, for example, a screw feeder and shaker feeder. As the charge in feed hopper 320 decreases, more reactant mixture 150 can be provided through load-lock hopper 330, as described above. Feed hopper 320 can be made ~~suffieient-~~ sufficiently large to minimize the frequency at which hopper 320 needs to be re-loaded.